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External Voting Rights from a Citizen Perspective – Comparing Resident and Non-resident Citizens' Attitudes towards External Voting

Staffan Himmelroos*  and Johanna Peltoniemi* 

The number of countries that have adopted policies allowing emigrants to participate in home country elections from abroad has increased greatly in the last few decades. The enfranchisement of non-resident citizens in home country elections is, nevertheless, somewhat controversial because it gives political influence to individuals who are unlikely to be affected by the outcome of an election. Despite an active debate on external voting rights among political theorists, little is known what the citizens themselves think of this practice. To examine how both non-resident and resident citizens perceive external voting rights, we use two surveys of Finnish citizens from 2019. The first survey was directed to Finnish citizens living abroad ($n = 1,949$), and the second was conducted using an online panel consisting of Finnish citizens living in Finland ($n = 994$). Both surveys included items with normative questions about external voting rights, which allows us to compare what resident and non-resident citizens think of the enfranchisement of external citizens. Our findings suggest that resident citizens view external voting rights more negatively than non-resident citizens. The factors associated with these attitudes are also quite different for the two examined populations. For resident citizens more education and ideological self-placement to the left is associated with more positive views of external voting rights, while experience of having voted from abroad and dissatisfaction with democracy in the host country is associated with more positive views among non-resident citizens.

Introduction

Increasing mobility and migration challenge us to reconsider the way democracy is conceived and practised. However, there appears to be a

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disconnect between how human mobility is changing the way we conceive external electoral rights and democratic theory (Beckman 2012, 18). On the one hand, we see a development where democracies around the world are increasingly generous when it comes to enfranchising their external citizens (Honohan 2011; Lafleur 2013; Lafleur 2015; Bauböck 2018). On the other hand, the perhaps best-known principle of democratic inclusion, that is, the all-affected principle, suggests that only those affected by decisions should have a right to participate in making them (Dahl 1970). A principle that does not fit very well with a practice whereby non-resident citizens, who are relatively unlikely to be affected by the decisions in the home country, are granted the right to participate in the decision-making process. Hence, some scholars have argued that non-resident citizens should not have the right to vote in home country elections (López-Guerra 2005).

While the tension between normative theories of democratic inclusion and policies expanding the enfranchisement of external citizens has been discussed extensively (e.g., López-Guerra 2005; Bauböck 2007; Owen 2011; Bauböck 2015), the discussion has so far remained mainly a theoretical one. Less is known about what the voters themselves think about external voting rights. Previous empirical research has focused on determinants of support for emigrant voting rights, although mainly from a party and/or country-level perspective (e.g., Collyer 2014; Østergaard-Nielsen et al. 2019; Stutzer & Slotwinski 2020), or policy issues related to electoral incentives and allowing emigrants to elect special emigrant representatives (Østergaard-Nielsen & Ciornei 2019). With some research (e.g., Bauböck 2003; Spiro 2006) suggesting that non-resident citizens' voting rights could be diluted if their interests are discretely represented in national legislatures. Only very recently have some researchers taken an interest in resident citizens' attitudes about external voting rights (Michel & Blatter 2020).

It should also be noted that external voting rights are by no means merely a philosophical question. There are substantial differences in how these rights are applied in practice. Among the Nordic countries, Denmark is very restrictive when it comes to external voting rights, while Sweden and Finland have policies that make it relatively easy for external citizens to participate in home country elections (Hansen 2018; Peltoniemi 2018b).

This article contributes to the existing normative discussion by presenting empirical data. We study citizen attitudes towards one example of limiting the voting right (should non-resident citizens' right to vote be cancelled after 10 years of emigration) and one example of expanding the voting right (should non-resident citizens be eligible in local elections). We examine how external voting rights both from the perspective of non-resident citizens and resident citizens. The findings of this article offer a new understanding of attitudes regarding external voting rights, as there, at least to our knowledge, are no other studies that have examined the attitudes about voting

rights among non-resident citizens, nor any that compare the attitudes of non-resident and resident citizens. The key research question of this article is: Do the attitudes of resident and non-resident citizens differ in the questions of limitation and expansion of voting rights?

To answer the question, we use two recent surveys conducted among Finnish citizens. The first was conducted among a stratified random sample of Finnish citizens living abroad ($n = 1,494$) in the aftermath of the 2019 Finnish parliamentary elections. The second survey was completed a few months later with respondents ($n = 994$) from an online panel consisting of Finnish citizens living in Finland. The surveys included the same items dealing with external voting rights from a more normative perspective, thereby allowing us to compare what resident and non-resident citizens think of the scope of enfranchisement for external citizens and to compare the two groups. Data that enable such comparisons is relatively unique. Survey research based on a representative sample of non-resident citizens is already quite rare by itself (Ahmadov & Sasse 2016, 3), and even fewer studies include comparable data from the home country (see Dahlberg and Linde [2018] for an exception).

Our findings suggest that resident and non-resident Finnish citizens view external voting rights quite differently. Non-resident citizens are critical of the suggestion that voting rights should expire after 10 years abroad, while resident citizens tend to think that such a limitation could be a good idea. The factors associated with these attitudes are also quite different for the two examined populations. For resident citizens, it is mainly ideological self-placement, satisfaction with democracy, and education that explain attitudes towards enfranchising external citizens. In contrast, for non-resident citizens, it is the experience of having voted from abroad, dissatisfaction with democracy in the country of residence, as well as age and gender that explain attitudes towards enfranchisement.

External Voting and the Boundaries of Democracy

Traditionally, the notion of citizenship has embraced the concept of the nation-state as a fundamentally territorial one. These states are understood to exercise territorial jurisdiction and sovereignty, and the people located in the geopolitical space are its nationals. As nationals, they are accorded a set of rights and duties, which entitle the members to collective well-being. Part of this cluster of entitlements reserved for national citizens includes the full exercise of political rights: national suffrage, the right to hold public office and the right to unconditional acceptance as a resident of that state (Rubio-Marín 2006; Dahlin & Hironaka 2008).

The increasing mobility of people has challenged this perspective. Rhodes and Harutyunyan (2010, 472) have described the expanding

emigrant inclusion as a new international normative standard, the 'global-norm hypothesis.' Immigrants in many countries gain local voting rights even before they are eligible for citizenship, and simultaneously voting rights have been extended to citizens living abroad (see, e.g., Justwan 2015; Seidel 2015). Some countries have even given special representation in their national parliaments for emigrant citizens (Peltoniemi 2016). This reflects the emergence of disaggregated citizenship. The fundamental notion in the disaggregation of citizenship rights claims is that civil, political and social rights associated with membership are increasingly separated from each other. This is particularly prominent in the relationship between migration and citizenship (Benhabib 2005; see also Glover 2011, 209).

While in line with the increasing mobility and an increasingly transnational citizenry, external voting rights appear to be at odds with certain core democratic principles. According to the all-affected principle, all those affected by a decision should have a part in making it (Dahl 1970). Similarly, people who are not subject to collectively binding decisions should be excluded, that is, be denied participatory rights (Beckman 2014, 409). Referring to this logic, López-Guerra (2005) has suggested that emigrants, who are permanently living abroad (long-term emigrants) and are no longer subject to the laws and binding decisions of their country of origin, should not have the right to decide who will govern those who still live in the country. Hence, they should not be allowed to vote. This literature also clearly points out the problems with defining the demos merely in terms of formal state membership or citizenship status. Whereas non-resident citizens are not necessarily affected or coerced by the state's policies are included in the demos, non-citizen residents are excluded from the demos, even though they are often affected or coerced by a state's policies (López-Guerra 2005; Song 2012).

The all-affected principle presents us with some strong normative arguments regarding who should be included in political decision-making, but the principle is rather tricky to implement into democratic practice. If we determine the right to participate by the fact that interests are affected, the decision-making unit (those whose interest is affected) would have to be defined on a case-by-case basis, which would make it quite complicated, if not downright impossible, to administer the decision-making process (Lagerspetz 2015). Adding to the complexity is the fact that it is hard to define what affected implies (see Goodin 2007). Since it is nigh impossible to know who will be affected by a decision before it is made, it could mean that anyone whose interest is in any way potentially affected by a decision should be included. The problem with this line of reasoning is that virtually everyone could be included. Or as Goodin (2007, 64) argues, in its most expansive possibilist form, the all-affected principle would provide

good grounds for ‘giving virtually everyone on virtually everything virtually everywhere in the world’ a say.

While the all-affected principle builds on normative assumptions that may be difficult to convert into real-world democratic practices, it nevertheless underlines the controversial nature of external voting. Should someone have the right to take part in decision-making if they are not affected by the decisions? And it is by no means the only argument against allowing non-residents the right to vote in homeland elections. Walter et al. (2013) have suggested that permanent residence makes people fulfil three relevant pre-conditions for voting rights. First, residence guarantees that only those who are eligible to vote also bear the consequences of their own voting decisions (the aforementioned all-affected principle). Second, residence provides experience-based knowledge. Only a resident can experience everyday life, assess political achievements and judge whether representatives should stay in office or be replaced. Third, residence ensures citizens’ will to be part of the community. Being concerned about the community and having a sense of solidarity with the demos is necessary to ensure the stability of its legitimacy, as democracy needs a sense of ‘ownership’ and belonging to the polity (Bauböck 2018).

There are also practical concerns related to the normative question of external voting regarding the risk of swamping and tipping (Bauböck 2007, 2446; Honohan 2011, 551–52). In a small state, external voting may be problematic due to the size of the electorate abroad, which is the case, for instance, in Ireland with a population of just under 5 million citizens. On the other side of the border, in Northern Ireland, there are approximately 700,000 persons with an Irish passport. In total, the estimation of non-resident Irish passport holders is more than 3 million. Even if the external vote could not outnumber resident citizens, it might still be capable of exerting a tipping force on the electoral result. In practice, relatively few countries could be subject to potential swamping by an electorate residing abroad, and these countries have either been slower to introduce external voting or have limited its impact by having reserved constituencies for non-resident citizens (e.g., Croatia and Italy). Furthermore, turnout among emigrant voters is often on a much lower level than among resident voters (Bauböck 2007; Honohan 2011).

However, there are also reasons against disenfranchising non-resident citizens in an increasingly mobile and transnational world. Apart from the territorial frame (e.g., Dahl 1970; López-Guerra 2005), which questions external voting based on the-all affected principle, Østergaard-Nielsen et al. (2019) have identified two other types of demos-related frames from the literature. Ethnic frames (see e.g., Gans 2003) defend the extension of voting rights on the basis of ethnicity and ancestry and stakeholder frames that denounce the notion that citizens abroad are not affected by decisions

taken in the home country (e.g., Bauböck 2007; Owen 2009). The latter is supported by the fact that migrants tend to maintain their ties to home even when their countries of origin are geographically distant (see e.g., Bauböck 2003; Burgess 2014; Jakobson 2014). And even though external citizens are not affected or subjected to the decision-making of the demos in the same sense as the citizens living in the country of origin, they are still more likely to be affected than a random non-citizen not residing in that specific country. If they own property or have close relatives in their country of origin, they are likely to be affected by (or subjected to) the decision-making in that country to some extent (e.g., by taxation). Furthermore, as Honohan (2011) and Owen (2009) have pointed out, citizens abroad are subject to certain laws and government decisions, especially those concerning constitutional matters and citizenship itself.

Moreover, being stripped of the electoral rights in the homeland might lead to being deprived of any opportunity for democratic participation since becoming eligible for citizenship in the host country might take a long time (Peltoniemi 2018a). Hence, it might be reasonable to have a political voice in both contexts, at least temporarily. Honohan (2011) argues that perhaps the strongest ground for external voting lies in emigrants' continuing connections with the polity and a reasonable prospect of return. In fact, the prospect of return makes it possible to consider them genuine stakeholders and thus affected by the decisions made.

In addition, Erman (2013) maintains that while people are differently affected by a society's laws and regulations, they are still subject to them. The criterion of inclusion is not gradually but binary-coded; one is either a legal subject or not. Therefore, it is the fact of subjection – not a matter of degree – that counts as sufficient ground for voting for first-generation emigrants. Consequently, Rubio-Marín (2006) argues that external voting rights should be extended to the first generation of emigrants. Bauböck (2003) has similarly suggested that extraterritorial voting rights should expire with the first generation, and the transmission of formal membership itself should be stopped with the third generation.

A pragmatic solution, between the territorial and stakeholder frames, could involve introducing certain limitations on external voting, for example, that voting rights expire after a certain time abroad. In line with this reasoning, Lepoutre (2020, 351) has argued that a long-term emigrant who is no longer subject to the authority of a state progressively loses their claim for democratic inclusion. Moreover, Spiro (2006) has suggested that voting rights do not need to be extended on a one-person, one-vote basis, but in certain circumstances, it may be justifiable to accord lower proportional voting power to non-residents, especially if their interests are discretely represented in national legislatures.

The discussion above reveals several, at least partly conflicting, theoretical perspectives related to external voting. This article contributes to the existing normative discussion by presenting empirical data. We are interested to learn to what extent these perspectives reflect the views of those who are supposed to exercise or are affected by these rights. According to the normative perspective of legitimacy, a political system is legitimate when it conforms to certain notions of how a system ought to function, for example, regarding who should have influence over decision-making or how decisions are made (Beetham 1991). However, political legitimacy is also an empirical concept. When understood in empirical terms, legitimacy is expected to hinge on citizens' beliefs and perceptions of political systems, processes, or decisions rather than on independent criteria for legitimate procedures (Tyler 2006; Christensen et al. 2019).

In line with the empirical understanding of perceived legitimacy, we believe that it is crucial to study the public opinion of external voting rights among both residents and non-residents. In the following sections, we investigate study citizen attitudes towards one example of limiting the voting right (should non-resident citizens right to vote be cancelled after 10 years of emigration) and one example of expanding the voting right (should non-resident citizens be eligible in local elections). Both examples can be considered as practical means to overcome problems that arise with external voting rights. Limitation of external voting rights can be used to tackle the issues of swamping and tipping, as well as low levels of turnout. Furthermore, introducing external voting in local elections is a plausible, practical expansion of external voting rights.

Explaining Attitudes on External Voting Rights

As we have discussed, previous literature on external voting rights has largely been theoretically driven. Hence, the knowledge on whether or not citizens' attitudes reflect the different theoretical perspectives have so far eluded us. That said, we expect resident and non-resident citizens to have fairly different attitudes regarding the legitimacy of external voting policies. First, we expect that non-resident citizens view external voting rights more favourably than resident citizens, simply because the first group appears to have more to gain from external voting than the latter group. When the non-resident citizens retain their right to vote, it is something that they, in line with the stakeholder frame (e.g., Bauböck 2007), should appreciate. However, their vote may at the same time reduce the influence resident voters have in the decision-making process, that is, the essential problem of the all-affected principle emphasized in the territorial frame (Dahl 1970; López-Guerra 2005). The extent to which resident voters actually reflect on the impact of external voting is, nevertheless, unclear. Considering that one

of the arguments for external voting is to establish a continued loyalty to the homeland and increase the prospects of return, resident citizens might even want non-resident citizens to have the right to vote, even if it potentially reduces their own influence.

Another reasonable assumption is that the attitudes towards external voting will vary according to certain individual-level characteristics. However, there is little to go by in terms of prior knowledge. In fact, there is precious little research that examines attitudes on external voting rights or other attitudes regarding the boundaries of the democratic decision-making unit, for that matter. Apart from a recent large scale study comparing voting right expansion attitudes for immigrants and emigrants by Michel and Blatter (2020), which finds that education and age has a positive relationship with the enfranchisement of emigrants, while national identity has a negative relationship with the same attitude we do not have too much research informing us about what may be driving these attitudes.

Other research on attitudes related to the boundaries of democracy has mainly focused on felon enfranchisement (Pinaire et al. 2003; Dawson-Edwards 2008) or the enfranchisement of minors (e.g., Birch et al. 2015). While felon enfranchisement and the enfranchisement of minors are not directly comparable to external citizenship, these studies can help us understand which individual characteristics may be associated with attitudes on enfranchisement. Age, gender, party identification, and satisfaction with democracy have all been associated with attitudes about felon enfranchisement and the enfranchisement of minors, for example, but the importance of these variables seem to depend on the context and issue at hand.

Another related body of research that may be of relevance concerns democratic process preferences, that is, attitudes about how people want democracy to work (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002). In a study of Finnish citizens, Bengtsson and Mattila (2009) find that support for direct democracy, which represents an expansion of political influence for ordinary citizens, is associated with ideological self-placement to the left on the left-right scale, less satisfaction with democracy, and lower external efficacy. More education and having voted in the last parliamentary elections, on the other hand, reduce support for direct democracy. Based on the findings from these partially related research areas, we might at least expect ideological outlook and satisfaction with democracy to play a role in how people view external voting rights. Another piece of recent research (Østergaard-Nielsen et al. 2019) of potential relevance suggests that right-wing homeland parties are generally more likely to support emigrant voting rights. However, it remains unclear to what extent this is reflected in the behaviour of the voters.

It is also worth noting that the characteristics associated with attitudes on external voting are likely to be different for resident and non-resident citizens. This can partly be explained by the fact that different individual

characteristics are associated with positive or negative attitudes within the two populations. However, it can also be explained by individual characteristics that relate specifically to the experience of external citizenship, which respondents within the two groups do not necessarily share. Such as personal experience of non-residence, the length of non-residency, and dual citizenship. Resident citizens who have lived abroad themselves are likely to have another understanding of external voting rights than those who never have. Similarly, the length of the stay abroad is likely to affect non-residents, as the perspective on the home country is likely to change. Another important dimension to external voting rights, regardless of whether you are a resident or a non-resident citizen, is dual citizenship. Having dual citizenship allows an individual to possess political and economic rights in multiple countries. Dual citizenship also raises many of the same questions as external citizenship, as dual citizens often have the full political rights of a country they do not reside in (Brøndsted Sejersen 2008; Blatter et al. 2009; Vink & de Groot 2010).

Data and Methods

Data

The data used in this study originate from two surveys conducted in 2019, one on non-resident citizens and the other on Finnish citizens living in Finland. The first survey was conducted among Finnish citizens residing abroad to study the implications of external voting in the parliamentary elections held in April 2019. For the survey, a disproportionate stratified random sample of 10,000 Finnish emigrants who are entitled to vote was drawn from the Population Register Centre of Finland, and an invitation letter was sent to the selected individuals. The sample included residents from the 17 largest diasporas (in countries with >1,000 citizens and the right to vote in Finnish elections), 500 persons sampled from each country (with the exception of Sweden, 1,500 persons in the sample). Additionally, 500 persons were randomly sampled from the rest of the world (see also Nemčok & Peltoniemi 2021).

The data was collected using an online survey questionnaire. The questionnaire covered questions related to political and electoral participation. The questionnaire was available in three languages; in both official languages, that is, Finnish and Swedish, as well as in English. The data collection took place 23 May 2019 to 30 September 2019, with an effective response rate of 20 percent ($n = 2,101$). Although the response rate may seem rather low in comparison to similar surveys collected among resident citizens, it is largely in line with other surveys collected among citizens abroad. In two

previous larger data sets collected from non-resident citizens, the response rate has been 20–30 percent (Solevid 2016; Peltoniemi 2018a).¹ In our analysis, we included respondents from the 17 largest diasporas (not the random sample of the rest of the world) and only the individuals for which we were able to confirm their current host country. We have also limited the sample to include the same age bracket (18–70) as the resident sample (see below) to maximise comparability. Hence, the sample size for this study is 1,494.

The survey for resident citizens was distributed via Qualtrics and responses were collected from 13 November to 11 December 2019. The survey comprised an online sample of 994 Finnish citizens aged 18–70 stratified to reflect the general population structure when it comes to gender, age and region. Nevertheless, since the respondents come from an online panel assembled by data providers through nonprobability methods, we cannot exclude the fact that there is an element of self-selection. Due to these limitations, we have decided to keep the comparisons between the populations at a more general level and refrain from any direct statistical tests between the two populations in our analysis.

Dependent Variables

To measure non-resident and resident citizens' attitudes towards external voting rights, we use two survey items dealing with different aspects of external citizenship. The items are based on hypothetical statements regarding the voting rights of non-resident Finnish citizens (cf. Michel & Blatter 2020). The first statement concerns a potential time limitation to external voting rights, and the second concerns extending voting rights to another (lower) administrative level. The questionnaire was available in the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, as well as in English. Each of the items was measured on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The items are the following:

1. Finnish citizens who have lived abroad continuously for more than 10 years should not be eligible to vote in Finnish elections

Due to the apparent tension between external voting rights and democratic principles of inclusion, researchers have suggested certain limitations to external voting rights, and there are also countries where external voting rights expire after a certain time period (e.g., Denmark). Hence, limitations, such as an expiration date to external voting rights, could be seen as acceptable.

2. Finnish external citizens should also be allowed to vote in Finnish municipal elections

The second item involves a normative statement regarding the opportunity for external citizens to participate in local politics. From a normative democratic standpoint, this is the most controversial claim, as it suggests a right to participate from afar in political decision-making that is most likely to involve matters concerning the daily lives of those directly affected by the decisions. In Finland, such an arrangement would be possible, at least in theory, as all residents living abroad have or are assigned a 'home municipality'. It is the municipality Finnish citizens last had as their municipality of residence in Finland, or the 'home municipality' or that of either parent in case a person never lived in Finland. In case the municipality has ceased to exist (e.g., due to municipal mergers), or the home municipality cannot otherwise be determined, the default home municipality is Helsinki (Ministry of Justice 2020).

Independent Variables

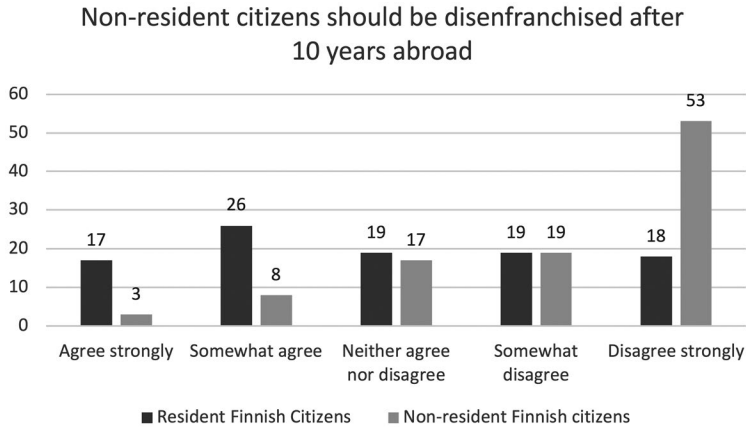
To gain a better understanding of how resident and non-resident citizens perceive external voting rights, we also examine some possible explanations behind the opinions. Rather than trying to identify an exhaustive list of possible explanations for each of the contexts, we focused on factors that are comparable across the two groups we study. While this imposes certain limitations with regard to the explanatory variables we are able to include in the analysis, we believe that maximising comparability across the findings is the preferable approach.

Drawing on previous research and taking the comparability of our two surveys into account, we examine eight potential factors that could explain how people view the enfranchisement of non-resident citizens. These include whether the respondent holds dual citizenship, whether they voted in the last parliamentary elections in Finland and where they place themselves ideologically. We also control for the effect of age, gender and education. These variables are exactly the same for both groups of respondents. In addition, we include two (or three for the non-resident citizens) variables that are very similar for both groups. For the resident citizens, we include an item asking whether they have lived abroad, while for non-resident citizens, we include a measure of how long they have lived abroad. We also include measures of satisfaction with democracy for both groups of respondents in the analyses, but the questions have been framed slightly differently for the different groups. This is due to a need to differentiate between satisfaction with democracy in the home country and in the country of residence for non-resident citizens.

Results

We approach the analysis in two steps. First, we make use of some descriptive statistics to gain a better understanding of how citizens at home and

Figure 1. Share (%) of Resident and Non-resident Finnish Citizens Agreeing with Statement ‘Finnish Citizens Who Have Lived Abroad Continuously for More Than 10 Years Should Not Be Eligible to Vote in Finnish Elections’.

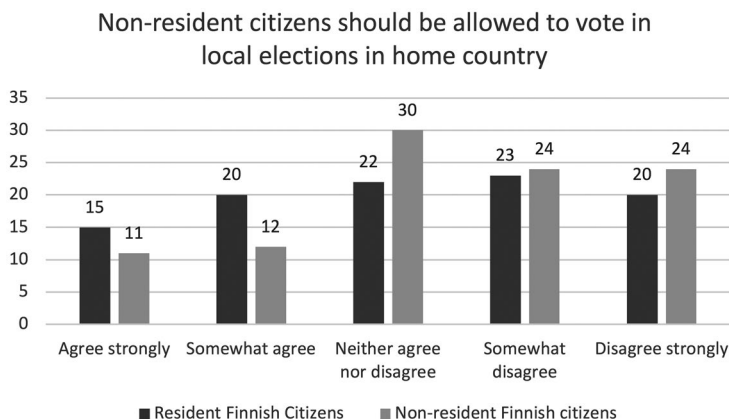


abroad view the voting rights of external citizens. Second, we look at potential explanations for different attitudes on external voting rights among both resident and non-resident citizens using regression analysis.

The outcome displayed in Figure 1 shows a clear difference between resident and non-resident citizens when it comes to introducing a time limit on enfranchisement for citizens living abroad. For the non-resident citizens, survey weights are used to adjust for the variation in non-resident population size in the included countries (see Appendix C for more information). Among the non-resident citizen respondents in our survey, there is very little understanding of such an arrangement. Only about 10 percent of non-resident citizens see this as desirable, while 53 percent disagree strongly with the statement that ‘Finnish citizens who have lived abroad continuously for more than 10 years should not be eligible to vote in Finnish elections’. The resident citizens, on the other hand, are much more likely to agree with the aforementioned statement. Of the resident citizens, 43 percent strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statement. At the same time, it is worth noting that more than half of the respondents either have no preference or tend to disagree with the statement that ‘Finnish citizens who have lived abroad continuously for more than 10 years should not be eligible to vote in Finnish elections’. Hence, there seems to be a fair amount of understanding for non-resident voting rights, even if resident citizens do not view them as favourably as the non-resident citizens.

When it comes to the enfranchisement of non-resident citizens in local elections, the attitudes are surprisingly similar among resident and non-resident citizens (Figure 2). The responses are fairly evenly distributed

Figure 2. Share (%) of Resident and Non-resident Finnish Citizens Agreeing with Statement 'Finnish External Citizens Should Also Be Allowed to Vote in Finnish Municipal Elections'.



across the response alternatives for both groups, and neither agree nor disagree is the most popular response for both groups. Interestingly, the support for the statement 'Finnish external citizens should also be allowed to vote in Finnish municipal elections' is stronger among resident citizens (35 percent) than among non-resident citizens (23 percent). Moreover, the support for the enfranchisement of non-resident citizens in local elections (35 percent) is almost at the same level as for continued enfranchisement after 10 years for non-resident citizens (37 percent). This seems rather counterintuitive from the standpoint of democratic theory, as it appears that a third of the resident citizens are willing to accept the influence of a group of citizens who is unlikely to be affected by the decisions. Moreover, non-resident citizens would influence decisions that are very close to the daily lives of those living in the municipalities (Figure 2).

In the second part of the analysis, we examine different explanations for supporting the enfranchisement of non-resident citizens among the respondents to our two surveys with the help of two linear regression models. In this analysis, we have combined the two measures into a general measure or index of attitudes towards enfranchisement. We rely on an index rather than individual items for the explanatory part of the analysis since external voting rights represent an issue that is generalizable to almost any country context, but the hypothetical items by which we measure the attitudes are not necessarily as representative. Additional analyses also suggest that combining the two items into an index presents a viable approach.² Using the index as the dependent variable, we examine how a number of factors are related to attitudes towards the enfranchisement of non-resident citizens. In

the second regression model (Table 1), where the attitudes of non-resident citizens are being analysed, country-based survey weights are used to adjust for the variation in non-resident population size in the included countries.³ For this model, the standard errors are also clustered at the country level.

In our analysis of what explains attitudes towards enfranchisement among resident citizens, we find that most of the results align with our general expectations. However, some findings are more robust than others. Self-placement to the left of the ideological spectrum is clearly associated with a more favourable view of enfranchisement for non-resident citizens. Moreover, we find that being highly educated has a significant and positive link with the attitude towards enfranchisement. Among the other variables that are directly comparable between the two groups of respondents, we find that being a citizen of two countries has a positive relationship with the attitude towards enfranchisement. Interestingly, having voted in the last parliamentary election has a negative relation with the enfranchisement attitude. However, the last two relationships are only significant at the 0.10 level.

The last two variables in the model with resident citizens show that having lived abroad is positively correlated (again only at 0.10 level) with a general measure for the enfranchisement of non-resident citizens and that a similar but more pronounced pattern can be found for satisfaction with democracy. The more satisfied you are with democracy in Finland, the more likely you are to assess the enfranchisement of non-resident citizens favourably.

The findings from the second model, which focuses on non-resident citizens, are noticeably different from the first model. For several variables, the effects are the opposite of the ones found among resident citizens. While voting in the last parliamentary elections had a negative effect for resident citizens, it is both positive and more robust for non-resident citizens. One potential explanation for these results could be that past turnout is associated with a stronger interest in politics, which could explain why resident voters are more cautious with external voting rights. People with a high interest in politics are likely to possess more information about the political system. While this does not explain the higher wariness about external voting rights, it would be logical that those with more information about the political system are more cautious when it comes to the expansion of voting rights (e.g., Denny & Doyle 2008). Moreover, politically engaged residents might see emigrants as a political out-group (e.g., Rooduijn et al. 2021). This could potentially explain why they are less willing to grant non-resident citizens political rights.

On the other hand, as voting can be self-reinforcing (Bhatti et al. 2016), past turnout could predict opposite findings among non-resident voters. In other words, the practice of voting makes you aware of voting rights and increases the interest in protecting these rights. Moreover, as previous

Table 1. Regression Models (OLS) Explaining Attitudes towards the Enfranchisement of Non-resident Citizens among Resident and Non-resident Finnish Citizens

Resident citizens		Non-resident citizens	
	Coef. (Std. err)		Coef. (Std. err)
Age	-0.22 (0.46)	Age	1.41* (0.57)
Gender (female)	-0.10 (0.14)	Gender (female)	0.18* (0.08)
Education (high)	0.69*** (0.26)	Education (high)	-0.25 (0.20)
Dual citizenship	0.60 [†] (0.31)	Dual citizenship	0.14 (0.16)
Voted in 2019 parliamentary elections	-0.31 [†] (0.17)	Voted in 2019 parliamentary elections	0.56*** (0.17)
Ideology (left-right)	-1.67*** (0.31)	Ideology (left-right)	-0.28 (0.25)
Have lived abroad	0.35 [†] (0.19)	Length of time abroad	-0.39 [†] (0.21)
Satisfaction with democracy	1.03*** (0.30)	Satisfaction with democracy (Current home country)	-0.92* (0.33)
		Satisfaction with democracy (Finland)	0.57 (0.68)
Number of observations	970		1.317
R ²	0.07		0.04

Notes: All independent variables coded to vary between 0 and 1. More information on coding and descriptive statistics for each variable in Appendix A. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$;

research (see Gallego & Oberski 2012; Panagopoulos & Lehrsfield 2015) suggests, turnout is not only associated with higher political interest and knowledge but also with personality traits such as emotional stability and extraversion.

Opposite patterns can also be found for satisfaction with democracy and length of time abroad. While satisfaction with democracy is associated with a more positive attitude towards external voting among resident citizens, satisfaction with the democracy in the country of residence is negatively associated with the enfranchisement attitude for non-resident citizens. It appears that the more dissatisfied you are with democracy in the host country, the more you value the right to vote in Finnish elections. There is no significant relationship for satisfaction with democracy in Finland, however.

The length of the stay abroad also has an effect, albeit at the more lenient 0.10 level. Perhaps expectedly, concern with the right to vote diminishes somewhat as the time abroad increases. This is likely the result of the home country becoming less relevant to non-resident citizens over time. Age and gender also display significant correlations with the enfranchisement attitude. Among non-residents, it appears that older respondents and women are more concerned with the right to vote.

Conclusions

In this study, we draw on public opinion research to gain new insights on external voting rights. We examine the desirability of external voting, an issue where political theorists have been quite divided, by asking both resident and non-resident citizens how they view external voting rights. Our findings suggest that resident and non-resident Finnish citizens view external voting rights fairly differently. Non-resident citizens are critical of the suggestion that voting rights should expire after 10 years, whereas resident citizens tend to think that such a limitation could be a good idea. These findings reflect the different perspectives presented in the theoretical literature quite nicely. In line with the normative argument that non-resident citizens should not have the right to vote because they are not directly affected by the outcome (e.g., López-Guerra 2005), the resident citizens, who are directly affected, are more critical of external voting rights. The more positive attitudes towards external voting expressed by the non-resident citizens, on the other hand, are likely a reflection of the stakeholder frame (Bauböck 2007). Non-resident citizens feel that they have a strong connection with the home country and perhaps also think that they could potentially be affected by the outcome. Hence, they have an interest in making their voices heard in home country elections.

The results of our study also suggest that voting rights have a different meaning for residents and non-residents. To the majority of the resident

citizens voting rights insinuate an active relationship with the democratic society they are part of. For non-residents, electoral rights in the homeland seem to be important primarily as a symbolic gesture of romanticized belonging to the country of origin. This latter notion is supported by the fact that electoral participation is decidedly lacklustre among emigrated Finnish citizens, despite their apparent unwillingness to give up these rights. Our findings for the resident Finnish citizens were somewhat different than Michel and Blatter's (2020) findings on resident citizens' attitudes towards enfranchisement of emigrants, but this is likely explained by the fact that the populations for the studies were quite different, as were the items used to measure enfranchisement attitudes.

Interestingly, the results for the second item, which focused on whether external citizens should be able to take part in local elections, showed that resident citizens are more positive than non-resident citizens about this suggestion. There are, nonetheless, a couple of plausible explanations for this somewhat unexpected outcome. First, the relatively large share of undecided (neither agree nor disagree) respondents implies that this is a question that remains rather opaque to most citizens. They may simply have a hard time evaluating what the implications of such an arrangement would be. Second, the more substantive support among resident citizens could be explained by them seeing non-resident citizens at the local level mainly as emigrants who are not very unlike themselves. They may very well be thinking of people who used to live in the same municipality but now live abroad.

The fact that non-resident citizens are substantially less interested in being enfranchised in local elections than being enfranchised in national elections after 10 years abroad is also quite interesting. While a large majority of the external citizens wanted to maintain their right to take part in national elections, they are relatively uninterested in the opportunity to participate in local politics. This could suggest that there is some limit to what non-resident citizens feel that they should be allowed to take part in, but it could also stem from a lack of knowledge of local issues and politics after having moved abroad. This finding is also in line with the normative discussion on external voting rights as non-resident citizens are most likely to be affected by decisions made on a national level, such as decisions regarding taxation, social security and citizenship rights and duties (e.g., Owen 2009; Honohan 2011). Locally made decisions, on the other hand, are more likely to affect only residents in the municipalities or regions in question. Over time non-residents might also become less affected by the decisions made on a national level (cf. Bauböck 2003; Rubio-Marín 2006; Lepoutre 2020), and our results also indicate that the concern with enfranchisement weakens the longer resident citizens have been abroad.

The factors associated with these attitudes are also quite different. For resident citizens, it is mainly ideological outlook, satisfaction with democracy

and education that explain attitudes towards enfranchising external citizens, whereas, for non-resident citizens, it is the experience of having voted from abroad, dissatisfaction with democracy in the country of residence, as well as, age and gender that seem to explain attitudes towards enfranchisement.

Despite an apparent lack of public opinion research on the boundaries of democratic decision-making units in general and external voting rights in particular, the mechanism explaining these attitudes seems, at least based on our study, to be quite straightforward. Being more educated and placing yourself ideologically more to the left predicts a more positive view of external voting rights among resident citizens. This is largely in line with findings from the literature on process preferences, which suggests that more educated and left-leaning respondents tend to prefer more inclusive democratic decision-making methods (Bengtsson & Mattila 2009). Being an active voter or dissatisfied with the state of democracy in the host country is associated with greater support for external voting rights among non-resident citizens. This is hardly a surprising finding considering that this would be the respondents with the greatest self-interest in upholding their electoral rights vis-à-vis the home country.

The generalisability of these results is subject to certain limitations. Although the response rate was decent in comparison to other similar surveys, and the sample is relatively large, the focus on citizens of one country limits generalisations to other countries. Non-response bias may also be a bigger issue than usual since it is the non-resident citizens who are more interested in Finland that is likely to respond to a survey from the home country. Thus, more research looking at other countries with different laws on external voting than Finland (e.g., Denmark with its restrictive policies) is needed to substantiate these findings and to generate a greater understanding of attitudes towards external voting rights.

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NOTES

1. One reason for the relatively low response rate is expired address information. The extent of this problem is, nevertheless, hard to estimate. According to an estimate by the Population Register Centre of Finland, this would concern approximately one third of the addresses for non-resident Finnish citizens.
2. The two items are highly correlated in the resident survey data ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$). While the correlation for the items is not as high in the non-resident survey data ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$), we believe that comparability and ease of interpretation is preferred over multiple models using other regression techniques. Nevertheless, for robustness purposes we also ran multilevel models and separate logistic regression models for the individual items. These models did not produce results that substantially differed from the ones we present. However, for the item measuring attitudes toward enfranchisement in

local elections in the case of non-resident citizens, the independent variables were not able to explain much, suggesting that the result for this group were mostly driven by the attitudes regarding enfranchisement in national elections.

3. The need to include survey weights were estimated with the help of the Breusch–Pagan test for heteroskedasticity ($\chi^2 = 16.76, p < 0.001$).

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APPENDIX A

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR VARIABLES USED IN THE REGRESSION MODELS

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Description
<i>Resident citizens</i>	994					
Enfranchisement attitude	994	3.81	2.15	0	8	Additive index combining values (0–4) from the two survey items (see p. 17) measuring attitudes towards external voting.
Age	994	0.43	0.15	0.18	0.69	Age (in 2019) divided by 100
Gender (female)	994	0.51	0.50	0	1	1 = Female, 0 = Male
Education (high)	984	0.40	0.49	0	1	1 = degree from universities of applied sciences or university, 0 = other
Dual citizenship	994	0.06	0.24	0	1	1 = dual citizenship, 0 = only Finnish citizenship
Voted in 2019 parliamentary elections	980	0.78	0.41	0	1	1 = voted, 0 = did not vote
Ideology (left-right)	994	0.50	0.23	0	1	0–10 scale recoded into 0–1, 0 being the furthest to the left and 1 being the furthest to the right
Have lived abroad	994	0.18	0.38	0	1	1 = lived abroad, 0 = have not lived abroad
Satisfaction with democracy	994	0.60	0.23	0	1	0–10 scale recoded into 0–1, 0 being the least satisfied and 1 being the most satisfied with democracy
<i>Non-resident citizens</i>	1,494					
Enfranchisement attitude	1,491	4.97	1.79	0	8	Additive index combining values (0–4) from the two survey items (see p. 17) measuring attitudes towards external voting
Age	1,494	0.46	0.14	0.18	0.7	Age (in 2019) divided by 100
Gender (female)	1,491	0.69	0.46	0	1	1 = Female, 0 = Male
Education (high)	1,477	0.81	0.39	0	1	1 = degree from universities of applied sciences or university, 0 = other
Dual citizenship	1,483	0.31	0.46	0	1	1 = dual citizenship, 0 = only Finnish citizenship
Voted in 2019 parliamentary elections	1,491	0.53	0.50	0	1	1 = voted, 0 = did not vote
Ideology (left-right)	1,476	0.50	0.23	0	1	0–10 scale recoded into 0–1, 0 being the furthest to the left and 1 being the furthest to the right
Length of time abroad	1,382	0.49	0.25	0.13	1	0 = Less than 5 years, 0.14 = 6–10 years, 0.29 = 11–15 years, 0.43 = 16–20 years, 0.57 = 21–30 years, 0.71 = 31–40 years, 0.86 = more than 40 years, 1 = never lived in Finland
Satisfaction with democracy (Current home country)	1,475	0.61	0.24	0	1	0–10 scale recoded into 0–1, 0 being the least satisfied and 1 being the most satisfied with democracy
Satisfaction with democracy (Finland)	1,472	0.74	0.19	0	1	0–10 scale recoded into 0–1, 0 being the least satisfied and 1 being the most satisfied with democracy

APPENDIX B

AGE, GENDER AND EDUCATION OF THE RESPONDENTS TO THE RESIDENT CITIZENS SURVEY AND THE FINNISH POPULATION IN GENERAL

	Respondents (%)	Population (%)
Age		
18–29	23.5	21.9
30–39	18.8	19.8
40–49	18.2	18.3
50–59	21.0	20.1
60–70	18.4	19.9
Gender		
Male	49	49
Female	51	51
Education		
% higher educational qualifications	40	32

Notes: Population data from Statistics Finland <https://www.stat.fi>. Higher educational qualification: degree from universities of applied sciences or university.

AGE AND GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTS TO THE NON-RESIDENT CITIZENS RESPONDENTS COMPARED TO THE SAMPLE OF THE SURVEY

	Respondents (%)	Sample (%)
Age		
18–29	14.3	21.0
30–39	20.1	21.8
40–49	25.0	21.2
50–59	21.6	18.4
60–70	20.9	17.4
Gender		
Male	31.5	36.2
Female	68.5	63.8

APPENDIX C

SHARE OF FINNISH NON-RESIDENT CITIZENS IN SAMPLED COUNTRIES, SAMPLE SIZE AND RESPONDENTS PER COUNTRY

Country	Share of non-resident Finnish citizens (%)	Sample size (age 18–85)	Nbr of respondents (age 18–70)
Sweden	46.7	1,500	144
USA	8.8	500	70
Germany	6.7	500	102
UK	6.2	500	90
Canada	5.3	500	73
Australia	3.6	500	55
Switzerland	3.1	500	101
Norway	3.0	500	69
Spain	2.6	500	65
France	1.7	500	91
Denmark	1.4	500	97
Netherlands	1.2	500	102
Italy	1.2	500	88
Estonia	0.9	500	68
Belgium	0.8	500	132
Austria	0.6	500	104
Israel	0.5	500	43